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DE RUEHTC #0194/01 0321645

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INFO RUCNMUC/EU CANDIDATE STATES COLLECTIVE
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RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY BAKU 0095
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0093
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 000194

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2017

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [EUN](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [NL](#)
SUBJECT: DUTCH-FUNDED MEDIA PROGRAMS FACE IRANIAN HARASSMENT

REF: A. THE HAGUE 184

[1B.](#) 06 THE HAGUE 2661 (NOTAL)
[1C.](#) 06 THE HAGUE 2634 (NOTAL)

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Classified By: Political Counselor Andrew J. Schofer; reasons 1.4 (b and d).

[11.](#) (SBU) Summary: Three participants in a Dutch-sponsored media diversity program were arrested January 27, on their way to a training session in India. They were released the next day. Iranian authorities have reportedly filed charges and accused the Dutch government of acting as a conduit for U.S. funding. Twelve other participants were prevented from travelling to the training program. The incident follows similar problems in late 2006. So far, the Dutch reaction has been muted. End summary.

Iranian participants in Dutch program arrested January 27

[12.](#) (SBU) Dutch MFA Human Rights Policy Officer Sonja van der Meer confirmed that three participants in a Dutch-funded media training program were arrested January 27 as they attempted to depart for a training session in India. The three women - Mansoureh Shodjayi, Talaat Taghinia, and Farnaz Seyfi - are all, according to van der Meer, active women's rights campaigners and have been involved in a signature campaign aimed at changing discriminatory legislation. Van der Meer said it was not clear to the Dutch MFA whether the women were detained as a result of their participation in the Dutch program or in the signature campaign. All three were released the next day. Charges have reportedly been filed, and the Dutch embassy in Tehran has been in touch with the women's lawyer.

[13.](#) (SBU) The women were flying to India to participate in a training program organized by Sharhzad News, which is affiliated with Radio Netherlands (ref C). Twelve other participants in the program were prevented from boarding the same flight, according to van der Meer, but were not arrested or charged.

[14.](#) (SBU) The incident was picked up by the Dutch national NRC Handelsblad (front page) and the BBC Monitoring Service on January 30. NRC Handelsblad quoted Iranian human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi, who is representing the three women, as saying that the Iranian government accuses the Netherlands of acting as a conduit for U.S. funding. The charges against

the women, according to the paper, include "participating in workshops organized by anti-revolutionary forces." MFA's van der Meer could not confirm this aspect of the story but noted that the Iranians have previously objected to Dutch funding of U.S.-based Freedom House.

Harassment of Dutch-funded programs not new

¶5. (SBU) The January 27 arrests follow incidents in late 2006, when participants in Dutch-funded programs also faced harassment and detention. On November 21, two journalists were detained after returning from a training program in the Netherlands. They were later released. On December 4, a Netherlands-based trainer participating in Press Now's training program was expelled from Iran (ref C).

Official Dutch reaction restrained

¶6. (C) Van der Meer told poloff that the Dutch government had not approached the GOI about the arrests. For now, said v/d Meer, the Dutch embassy in Tehran would maintain close contact with the women's lawyer, Shirin Ebadi. Raising the foreign profile of the case might not serve the women's interest, she continued, and the Dutch would probably rely heavily in this respect on Ebadi's advice. MFA Iran desk officer Loek ten Hagen informed post (ref B) that the GONL had also declined to raise the November and December incidents with the GOI. In a December 7 meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki (ref B), Dutch Foreign Minister Bot chose instead to raise the detention of Dutch-Iranian human rights activist (and former leader of the Ahwazi Liberation Organization) Faleh Abdullah al-Mansouri (ref B, update septel).

Dutch sensitivity to association with U.S. programs

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¶7. (C) Van der Meer and Deputy Head of the MFA's Human Rights Division, Birgitta Tazelaar, have both made clear the MFA's desire to work - and be seen as working - independently of the U.S. They cite recipients' discomfort with being associated with foreign funding, much less U.S. funding. Van der Meer opined that, if the charges against the three activists arrested January 27 included allegations that the Netherlands was acting as a conduit for U.S. money, the MFA "would have to react."

ARNALL